

Christ Must Increase, I Must Decrease

John 3:22-36

July 24, 2022

1. Introduction to the Baptism of Jesus (22-24)

- a. "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized" (24).
 - i. These events take place sometime after Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus.
 - ii. Jesus took His disciples into the Judean country to spend time with them there.
 - iii. While spending time with His disciples, He was also baptizing.
 1. Jesus was not doing the baptism according to 4:2, but He was directing His disciples to do so on His behalf.
 2. Jesus was the true Baptist; Baptism in the church is to be in the name of Jesus, because NT baptism is to be an identification with Jesus.
- b. "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized" (23).
 - i. John was also baptizing simultaneously in Aenon which is very likely modern day Ainun, which has many springs of water, and made it a suitable place for baptisms.
 1. John's baptism was never to gain a personal following, but instead to prepare people to follow Jesus.
 2. People were continually coming to John to be baptized.
- c. "For John had not yet been put into prison" (24).
 - i. John's gospel complements the Synoptic Gospels (Mathew, Mark, Luke) by showing the readers what happened between Jesus' temptation and the arrest of John.
 - ii. John's gospel only references John's imprisonment without giving any details, emphasizing John's message rather than his person.

2. Baptism Controversy (25-26)

- a. "Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying" (25).
 - i. An unnamed Jew brought a question to John's disciples; it seems he wanted to know which baptism was the one that offered purification, the baptism of John, or the baptism of Jesus.
 - ii. This controversy gives John the opportunity to set the matter straight, not just for the sake of his disciples, but for all disciples who've come after him.
- b. "And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him" (26).
 - i. John's disciples address him as "Rabbi," showing that their allegiance still belongs to him even though Jesus is now on the scene.
 - ii. John's disciples know that the One that John has prophesied has now begun His ministry and they're having a hard time understanding John's role.

3. The Bridegroom and the Friend of the Bridegroom (27-30)

- a. "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (27).
 - i. John makes it very clear that a divine illumination is necessary to understand what is taking place before their eyes.
 - ii. John is about to make His final witness to the Light of the World.
- b. "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him" (28).
 - i. John reminds them that he had taught them that he was not the Christ (1:19-20).
 - ii. John reminds them that he was merely the herald sent before Him (1:21-23).
 - iii. John knew who he was in relation to Jesus, but John's disciples were struggling to grasp their identity in relation to Jesus.
- c. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (29).
 - i. John uses an analogy of a wedding to explain his identity in relation to Christ.
 - ii. John identifies himself as "the friend of the bridegroom" or shoshbin.
 1. The shoshbin in a Jewish wedding of that day was a close friend of the groom.
 2. The shoshbin was responsible for preparing the bride for the coming of the groom.
 3. The shoshbin guarded the bride listened for the voice of the bridegroom signaling his approach.
 - iii. John identifies Jesus as the Bridegroom, Who is receiving His bride.

- iv. The ministry of John the Baptist can be viewed as one of prewedding purification reflected in the ceremony of baptism, ensuring that God's people are prepared for the Bridegroom.
- v. This is the role of the Christian minister in the present day, preparing the bride for the coming of Christ, the Bridegroom.
- vi. Ephesians 5:25-27 "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."
- d. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (30).
 - i. John's disciples concern was misplaced; now that the Bridegroom had come for His bride, John must simply get out of the way and point all the attention to the Bridegroom.
 - ii. John states this as an imperative: Jesus must increase, and the Christian minister must decrease.
 - 1. For Jesus to increase, He must become the one Who gives.
 - 2. For the Christian minister to decrease, he must be the one who receives.

4. Concluding Commentary (31-36)

- a. The Preeminence of Christ: "He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all" (31).
 - i. John recognized that Jesus is above all because of His heavenly origin.
 - ii. John acknowledged his own origin as earthly, and therefore subservient to Jesus.
- b. Two Responses to Christ
 - i. Rejection: "And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony" (32).
 - 1. Jesus, the One who has seen and heard all things, is superior to John and all other disciples because He was "in the beginning" and "with God" (1:1).
 - 2. Jesus is the "Word", the ultimate "Witness", the perfect fulfillment of John's prophecy, and yet His witness is not received (cf: 1:11; 3:11).
 - ii. Reception: "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true" (33).
 - 1. Those who believe Jesus' witness testify to the truth by their faith.
 - 2. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son" (1 John 5:10).
- c. The Rewards for Reception:
 - i. The Filling of the Holy Spirit: "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (34).
 - ii. The Loving Protection of the Son: "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (35).
 - iii. Everlasting Life: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life:" (36a)
- d. The Reward for Rejection:
 - i. Eternal Death: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; (36b)
 - ii. The Wrath of God: "but the wrath of God abideth on him" (36c)
 - 1. Those who reject God's gift of love choose to remain under God's wrath.
 - 2. God's love is infinite, but so is His wrath.
 - 3. Those who reject His love receive His wrath.

Conclusion:

1. John's disciples valued their human leader above their Savior. Are you guilty of elevating a man over your allegiance to Christ? Are you dominated by what your leader thinks of you? Are you dominated by what other disciples think of you? Are you often in a conflict with another brother?
2. John's disciples had a very poor understanding of their identity in relation to Christ. Rather than preparing the way for Him, they were competing with Him. Inadvertently, they were trying to steal the glory that belonged to Christ. Why do you minister?
3. Do you see yourself as the friend of the bridegroom? Are you preparing yourself for His return? Who else are you preparing for His return? How are you preparing others for His return?
4. You decrease when you receive what Jesus offers: salvation, everlasting life, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, the fruit of the Spirit. Are you receiving what Jesus is offering you in this moment? Look in the areas of turmoil in your life. What is missing that you need to start receiving?